

**love  
is a  
season**

**jagannath prasad das**

In his earlier collection of poems, *First Person*, the poet had pictured a world where there was no hope and from which there was no escape.

*Love is a Season* is an extended sequence dealing in different ways with man's oldest obsession, that of his own mortality. The poems move back and forth between youth and love, time and death – and the shadows which fall across them. The poet finally seems to have come to terms with the changing seasons in the continuing world outside the window, where time reigns supreme. And every love is another death.

Though the poems are very personal, they are by no means confessional. The 'I' of the poems never wholly defines the author. Indeed personality, the poet hints, cannot be defined.

# LOVE IS A SEASON

JAGANNATH PRASAD DAS



ARNOLD-HEINEMANN

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## at the stroke of six

you made a promise  
we'll meet at the stroke of six  
at six in the evening and none but us  
the two of us at the city limits  
the evening would be just for us  
and time would stop sharp at six

when you went to the sea-beach  
with someone the other day  
the sun set suddenly  
the mermaids got frightened  
castaway ships stalled in midocean  
the waters flamed like fire  
and flowed blood red  
i was robbed of my time  
and then on my sick-bed from dawn  
to dusk and dusk to dawn  
in my fevered sleep  
there were no dreams  
and no memories for me

there will be evenings yet  
and there will yet be you  
with the sunshine of  
silent mornings in your breast  
your arms aching with midday's pain  
your body besieged with

the mysteries of darkest nights  
your eyes twitching  
to the excitement of traffic lights  
would you look for me  
on evenings like these  
with your hand on your breast  
cravingly on your dishevelled bed

this evening  
there will be sacrifices yet  
battles and bloodshed  
a dagger in the lover's hand  
a scream on the heroine's lips  
there will be death for this evening  
and resurrection too  
some making up and  
some suicide pacts  
on this anniversary of  
the beginning and end of love

you made a promise  
we'll meet at six  
at the stroke of six  
the two of us  
just we two in the lonely evening  
as if it were the last day of our lives  
and there is to be no redemption tomorrow

but look  
how hostile everything is  
the sky has turned crimson  
there is a strike in the city  
protests and processions  
there are prohibitory orders against us  
the city limits are oddly crowded today  
the clocks have all stopped at noon  
only you and me here  
it's six in the evening  
only you and me  
and the city's awe-struck populace



## times like these

when afternoons run away to the forests  
after the sunshine picnic  
and birds wipe off the brightness of the skies  
with their arrogant wings  
bodies of memories march in processions  
and overtake time  
the sun shrinks to a pale moon  
and a few ashen stars

in times like these  
every thing is probable but untrue here  
the only things that pervade  
are irrational shadows and unreal echoes  
i am engulfed suddenly  
in a sunset of the mirror

i had resolutions galore  
for you in the new year :  
to get you a harvest of wild stars from the skies  
to switch on the moon  
when you come to me on an evening such as this  
to get the waves of the sea  
to wash your feet on the steps to my room

but alas  
this is all that you'll see in my room :  
the first kiss framed in memories

hanging on the wall our photograph  
tinted with love and pain  
the complete setback of our destiny  
on my palm  
i'll show you all our sorrows  
converged on my face  
all our letters arranged  
like flowers meaningless on the table  
our sighs strewn all over the room  
like shreds of paper

there was a time remember  
when we searched for it  
all evening sitting by the meadows  
holding a handful of flowers  
looking entranced at the constellation  
the excitement that was  
in sitting side by side  
and in holding hands  
if you ask me today  
where such a day was lost  
why time turned suicidal  
and the polaris paled and faded  
if you ask me such questions alas  
i'll pick up a few plastic flowers  
quietly with my shaking hands  
and arrange them in your hair

i'll take you to an existence  
at the twin ends of time  
where you will see past present  
future all together  
you'll realise there is no distance  
between moonlight and darkness

no difference between being  
and nonbeing day and night  
happiness pain hope excitement  
forgetting and remembering  
it's all the same you'll find there  
the will to live and the wish to die  
there is no pain in winning  
as there is no joy in losing  
everything the same getting not getting  
separation and love

in times like these there is no use  
looking in the meadows  
in the sky in the room on the steps  
or on the meaningless table  
forget then everything  
there is no escape for time rules here  
look at the sky the stars  
with our names on them have set  
stand by my side for a while  
be still hold my hands  
nobody but nobody can live  
under such a sickly moonlight

# looking for myself

looking for myself  
i know i'll meet you some day  
suddenly close to me  
not much will be left of the night  
the imagined distance between  
the need for you and your proximity  
will be nonexistent  
all my search and endeavour  
will end surprisingly thus

all will be in shambles rent and riven  
layers of dust and cobwebs  
the sky rivetted to the walls  
the room littered with torn love letters  
my legs tired my hands inert  
polar winter in my body  
desert fire in my head  
warm blood staining the sheets  
and my breathing feeble at the final hours  
but there will yet be you by my side  
incarnate in my whole being  
your body stretched out  
on my neutral bed

hurricane in your every breath  
lightning in your every touch  
volcano of your mouth

each kiss its explosion  
each curve of the body  
dreadful tides of the ocean  
your eyes flashing the revolt  
of ejected meteors

i'll forget all  
i'll leave my house  
without a forwarding address  
i'll search for myself again  
on the outskirts of cremation grounds  
amidst penitent hermits  
and in the desexed existence  
of passionless celibates

i'll go from one pilgrimage to another  
*dashashvamedha* to *manikarnika*  
i'll be engrossed in the contemplation  
of *nabhi padma kundalini* and *brahma*  
i'll renounce in the *triveni* waters  
the last props of my existence

rejected love letters in my hand  
shrivelled flowers  
and a photograph of the dead  
i'll look for myself  
all alone on many a road

the blood of the first sun  
spilling on the tarmac  
the sky's cadaver lying  
on the cremation ground  
rows of empty houses weeping  
on both sides of the unending road  
the horizon silent and the wind rivetted  
to thorny trees and dry branches

in the weary last moments  
i'll meet you again in such a loneliness  
while I deceive a little  
and comfort some  
in my irate duality

# pain of remembrance

we sit here surrounded by spectators  
afraid of meeting alone and so  
in the middle rows of the auditorium  
with proximity our only relationship  
two neighbouring isles distanced by the ocean  
we'd be sitting silent in the dark  
i'll look at you possessingly  
but your eyes would be lost elsewhere  
your hands in mine but we both  
engrossed in our different quests :

what are the symptoms of death  
what is the true form of sorrow  
what colours pain brings  
what warmth separation  
what purpose birds flying about aimless  
errant clouds getting restless all of a sudden  
two dying meteors exchanging notes midsky  
the run out spring time  
seeking to touch the flowers

why does time burn here with such vengeance  
why does the morning stay restive  
even after the dreams are over  
why the fixed grey in the sky  
and the lull in the clouds  
the constricted anguish of the trees

the restless shrieks of the leaves  
sunshine with a sting of the funeral pyre  
and the touch of cremation in the air

the auditorium is full and the stage bare  
we wait eagerly  
as the intimacy of darkness  
hypnotises everybody  
loneliness runs its course  
with each tick of the clock  
we are all askance for we know  
the stage holds answers  
to all our questions  
with a single gesture of the hero  
numerous mysteries will get resolved  
one sidelong glance of the heroine  
will shatter all illusions  
and the definition of love fathomed  
in a very brief dialogue

suddenly the stage will blaze up  
in heavenly lights  
though only for a moment  
then everything will be shrouded  
in dark black sheets  
stifling all in the  
meagre expanse of memory  
everything will cease  
in the final moment of truth



there will be no  
resurrection rebirth  
salvation or *nirvana*  
nothing will remain  
except the pain of remembrance  
forget then everything  
the greed for eternal love  
or the desire for transient living

the auditorium is now empty  
the stage is dark  
and it's late in the night  
only you beside me  
and your hands in mine  
as the only proof  
of our onetime doubtful love

# waiting for you

some one did tell me waiting was death  
but waiting for you  
mornings and evenings  
get compressed to noon  
creating the illusion of a whole day  
but it's really a colourless existence  
this fear of death and the wish to be  
obliterated in sheer waiting

the stone statues you see  
in the museum of time  
you can tell them your secrets  
in your own private tongue  
you may call them names if you like  
in anger or in fear  
you can burn them down with your glance  
or ignore them with a gesture  
you can lock your eyes in theirs  
you could even go close to them  
but the guide says no  
they are not to be touched  
you may only speak to them

words and only words  
floods of language  
and gales of patter  
attempts to make contact

with alphabets  
trying to share relationships  
with vowels and consonants  
and to record confessions in codes  
but when it comes to the end  
beyond the exit door  
the speechless silence you meet  
is only of renunciation

some one did tell me waiting was death  
but waiting for you  
is a prolongation of living  
or is it a misunderstanding  
is it that you promised to come  
another day another time  
or may be you're waiting for me  
eagerly in another city

i'll read your letters again  
and once again in your memory  
i'll search for you in crowded streets  
i'll ask strangers about you  
and of your well being  
though the knocks on the door  
will be for my neighbours only  
i'll listen to each footfall  
with needless anxiety  
they will be outsiders all  
but in the hope of your reply i'll wait  
though it will be other names  
nagging my memory

you did say life was love  
but waiting for you

living itself is reason  
enough for living  
life its own meaning and approval  
life that is sometimes happiness  
sometimes sorrow  
experienceless existence sometimes  
a restless sequence of happenings  
where days are mere  
inseparable mornings and evenings  
where noon is a symbol  
only of the passage of time

life is love you had said  
but in the sequence of living  
time's bare museum echoes  
only flawed relationships  
so i'll keep on looking at the roads  
i'll search for your face in the crowds  
i'll read your letters again  
and i'll wait eagerly in my own  
private death wishes  
for someone did tell me  
waiting was death and so  
waiting for you

# till the end

my strange existence this  
shuttling in space  
and floating on the sea  
from time immemorial  
suspended amidst the revolution  
of moon sun planets and stars  
sometimes i overtake  
the onslaught of the waves  
swimming upstream  
and sidestepping the meteors  
sometimes i let myself  
float with the stream  
screaming as i drown  
i fly helpless sometimes  
in the whirlwind  
and other times i sleep peaceful  
on the floor of ocean or sky

your face shrinks in my hand sometimes  
and looks helpless into my eyes  
and then at times your face expands  
in a glitter of lights  
and i get lost  
in the pupils of your eyes  
we walk hand in hand sometimes  
i drag you to my bed  
i play with you a few moments

and then i sleep on your palm  
for æons on end

there is a twinkle in your face  
and the slice of smile grows  
it's now a crescendo of laughter  
in the wild winds  
i fly about like a leaf  
in the gale of laughter  
you glance at me for a moment  
and i burn for years  
in the smoldering fire of your eyes  
when your eyelids close  
everything subsides  
time remains still  
and i get lost in the body's night

there are no oceans  
no skies no storms  
no rains no fires nothing  
all quiet peaceful calm and static  
indifferent priests chanting away hymns  
in muted monotony  
of unintelligible words  
i reminisce through the pages  
of my abridged journals  
recorded in three short chapters

the black stallion gallops  
across the diffused clouds  
the clip-clop of its trot drowns all else  
the rider laughs  
chunks of forest and sky  
shake to the beat of his laughter

crowds gather with their heads bowed  
fear and disbelief in their mute eyes  
dazed i look for the polestar  
from side to side  
in the twitching eyes of lightning

what i supposed was  
the colour of your *sari*  
were only shattered clouds  
what i thought was  
the vermilion mark on your head  
was the setting sun

so i touched my face my chest my eyes  
faithfully i read out the pages  
i signed on all the dotted lines  
i scanned all in a sidelong glance  
i took your name a hundred and eight times  
and finally fixed my gaze on you

all misgivings of the night materialised  
to melt in the understanding  
of the soft morning sunshine  
it's now unbounded peace  
now only waiting for me

# after you leave

this is our road's end  
it's time to take leave  
to go our own ways  
at this crossing  
even before i could understand you  
and fathom your body  
even before i could  
share my secrets with you

the road stretches far  
but at this crossroad  
our relationship was cruelly aborted  
i was left behind on the platform  
while your train steamed away  
to some unknow city  
the moments we spent together  
were exiled for good  
this road stretches far i know  
but i have to get back  
unless the road engulfs me completely

even after you leave  
the crossroad will remain neutral  
the generals will stay alert  
on their stone mounts  
silhouette birds stay put  
on the telegraph wires



windows will merely look up  
at the tissue paper moon  
to dream of a caesarian sunrise  
and lamp-posts shiver  
at the thought of impending gloom  
then the palm of night will wipe off  
the platform in a flash

the whole room is engrossed  
in the memory of  
the unforgettable final moments  
echoes are frozen in remembrance  
window panes are all broken  
door curtains all drawn  
only the shadow of your memory  
flits about in my bare room  
the cold wind blows across the door  
and nudges me hard  
the dead bird gets pale and cold  
inside the bolted cage

i resign myself  
let the house burn down  
let it be auctioned out  
for though the house is mine today  
tomorrow it belongs to none  
the telephone keeps ringing  
and i let it ring on  
involved as i am  
in my many symbolic deaths

it's midnight now  
there is none in the auditorium  
only the clown on the stage

his head bowed in the last act  
the lonely bird beats its wings  
against the ceiling of the godless temple  
the penitent with his severed head  
lies prostrate on the cold pavement

there is a queer kinship  
between the end of life  
and the transient but lovely flesh  
we'll therefore be sitting in a row  
the penitent and the clown hand in hand  
in search of immortality  
at time's last frontiers

the *sari* will flutter  
and then will be seen no more  
the jingle of bangles will become faint  
distance and darkness  
will soon blot out your face  
when i remember you from  
five hundred miles away  
your feet will stop for a moment  
your thought disturbed a little  
there will be some flutter  
in remote hamlets  
away from the stations  
some birds will get lost in the storm  
some will dive into the grey pools of memory  
some will remain helpless on your lips  
and in the slight quiver of your fingers

i'll remember you effortless thus  
and then i will have no fear  
of death or immortality

in dreams many a time

you come in my dreams  
sometimes without notice  
at blazing noons and at dark nights  
at detached moments  
on crossroads of nameless cities  
on board ships lost in midocean  
you come as glittering reflection  
of stars on the waves of the sea  
golden sunshine on bright posters  
as birds and butterflies  
in the charmed air of spring

in dreams many a time  
you and your memories come to me  
like a spot of *kumkum*  
new patterns on the *palav*  
tiny mirror in the handbag  
straps of the *chappal*  
sefety pin tucked in the bangles  
like dainty flowers  
blossoming on the handkerchief

before you got lost  
in mid-distance the other day  
i touched you gently  
you shook your head and said no  
and the flowers withered

on the handkerchief  
the butterflies flew away  
from the *palav*  
the birds stopped their laughter  
the ship got wrecked on the lighthouse  
the noon was blacked out  
the crossroads became deserted  
march and april charred

left to myself i look at  
my numerous shadows on the waves  
i get shoved on the crossroads  
looking for an alternate life  
i ask for prices of things  
i am never going to buy  
with compass and map in hand  
i keep on waiting at a dead port

in my dreams many a time  
ships and lighthouses  
at times only the ocean  
sunshine on posters  
flowers and birds  
butterflies and a wounded april

all that is known to you  
most certainly  
all our encounters in my dreams  
all happiness and every pain

# days many kinds

## 1

some days are most serene  
distant hills are shaded green  
pictures realised in dreams  
are all straight-lined  
forests tranquil highways lonely  
clouds static in the charmed sky  
seas strangely quiet and  
weightless memories all soft-hued

arguments are superfluous here  
fame and renown unnecessary  
there is no use dissecting  
real and unreal  
resolving truth and untruth  
our only responsibility here  
is to remain undefiled and innocent

but there is the blood  
of forefathers  
brighter than death  
shining in my hands  
my desires burn down  
in their own fantasies  
i squirm between  
the fear and the want of love  
i live in the mortal dread

of many insignificant deaths  
that come on appointed days  
and what is sadder still  
of the trivial make-believe life

there would be days  
most serene and calm  
golden mornings would  
glitter in crystal lakes  
the mellow morning sun  
would open the petals of dreams  
our being here  
would seem most inept  
and like a dream  
it would get lost  
in the cackle of birds  
in the sunshine  
and in the scent of blossoms

all desires end  
when you reach the skies  
and touch the stars  
like the end of the play  
in sighs and in applause

2

some days  
the razor-sharp noon  
will slash the clock face  
the hostile roof of the sky  
will scatter handfuls of sparks  
colours will melt in butterfly wings  
the sky would go up in flames

and pour down screams of birds  
mountains will be razed  
the sea will take over the city  
ramshackle houses  
would float like islets  
all our memories and dreams  
will be left stifled  
in tumbledown rooms  
and in the skeletons  
of traffic lights

some days will be  
attired in robes of pain  
there will be  
sorrow and darkness  
in the very core of light  
loneliness would shroud everybody  
though you would be sitting beside me  
you'll have no inkling of  
whatever would be going on in my mind  
looking at the mysterious skies

in lonely moments like these  
i would only deign to listen  
to your laughter  
echoing like a background score  
in the waves in the clouds  
and in the last horizons  
silencing the turbulent skies

3

you'll come down in hesitant steps  
down the secret staircase

like the descending dusk  
letters will blossom on my table  
birds will tear away from the canvas  
voices of darkness  
will settle down like a shadow  
condemned souls will glow  
sin and virtue  
will stand their final trial

exiled here  
in the shadow of the mountains  
in the last rays of the sunset  
the fleeing deer of the evening  
and my hunting eyes  
will all get lost in the forest  
the final questions will  
wither away in frustration  
days will become crowns of thorn  
the sun will be sealed  
in the coffin of the waves  
and buried deep in the sea  
the last rays will slide off  
the name plate on the gate

pretensions of knowledge  
are futile here  
there is no need for answers  
you can love me only in your memory  
you can touch me with your feelings  
talk to me only with your eyes  
and that too in another world



in the closed hall of the temple  
 the feeble lamp spreads an eternal gloom  
 death sketches new faces on the walls  
 darkness curdles and melts  
 and curdles again  
 the sky becomes a network of black veins  
 stars blink lustreless like blind eyes  
 the dead moon tosses in the clouds  
 like a spectral galleon

there is the blazing noon  
 of the night in my room  
 honest truths launch out at me  
 through the window like the sun  
 the cadaver putrefies in the next room  
 there is no redemption  
 what the intellect accepts  
 the impulses reject

the supreme desire now  
 is to surrender body and soul again  
 with welcome in the eyes  
 and assent in the whole being  
 come let's live some moments  
 in our memories  
 let's take the treacherous road  
 and realise the night  
 in multiple deaths

pray be with me till the morning  
 and then prepare for the parting  
 let your ditties be set aside  
 for the final day

## other deaths

first of all i'll forget your eyes  
and then i'll forget you  
your pervasive presence that envelops me  
like space and encloses me like a coffin  
indeed i'll forget them all one by one

all my feelings  
you gathered in both your hands  
played about with them a little  
and put them away in your breasts  
so i'll forget your hands  
and i'll forget your breasts  
and then i'll forget you  
when your eyes become stars  
and you become the night  
and compel me to remember you thus  
i'll forget all till my death  
or till my other loves

the days are all very strange  
the morning sky casts a spell on me  
with its many shapes :  
pennant on the temple  
*saris* drying on roof tops  
photograph in the window  
lines of a poem in the telegraph wires  
many shapes in the day

many more in the night  
if the sky alone takes  
how shall i bear the stars and the clouds  
give me some strength oh lord  
to stand up to them

or better still  
let me stay within myself  
on this side of the flaming noon  
let there be orange evenings  
on the other side  
let there be you and your dream worlds  
let you be seeking me though i am not there

or else let's both go down  
the one road of entrance and exit  
making no claims on succession  
relinquishing crown and throne  
for life here decays  
in search of personal deliverance  
poetry is a fake syntax of dead words  
identity is lost in the quest of  
freedom and substance  
when there is doubt in every mind  
who will you ask questions to  
where the only consequence makes all causes  
meaningless in a moment

and when death comes  
looking for us one day  
with witness and proof of our growing up  
we'll stand on its courtyard  
counting the dreadful moments

our sorrows unrealised till the end  
there will be no eyes  
body hands sky or cloud  
the many shapes disfigured  
by the ravages of time  
will all be there pale ashen  
and indefinite

let such moments be propitious for you  
may you blossom like flowers in a new season  
may you live long and mother bonny babies  
may your world be lush green with rich harvests

my dead body lies here  
dolloed up in the coffin  
let them look at me with unconcerned eyes  
the girls of my previous birth  
all past their prime

## for some morning

nature has no curiosity  
for everything is  
unmoving and unchanging  
the constant whirl  
is only a different stillness  
days and nights  
are unceasing explosions  
life a perpetual rebirth  
time the monotonous recurrence  
of a single moment

you are beside me  
and the bridge of our arms  
spans the sky  
but look ahead  
the stream that touches the sea  
is static and still  
merely a constant backflow  
of the ocean's expanse

the sky has no complaints  
all happenings  
are patterns of shadows  
the hearty laughter  
of the waves in the seas  
the conspiracy of colours  
in the stolid sky

colours merging in the clouds  
clouds blending in the twitter of birds  
twitters lost in flower blossoms  
for a time a spell is cast  
on sky sea and clouds  
but then comes  
a dreadful silence  
quiet and self-effacing

silence comes as an echo  
in vacant moments  
as uncontrolled laughter  
amidst conversation  
respite between  
two experiences  
lull between dreams  
an interval in growing  
and distance of hand and hand  
silence reigns supreme  
in the roar of waves  
in the child's cry  
in the chanting of *mantras*  
and in the overflowing flood of words

nights have no worries  
for darkness is a measure  
of passage of unhappiness  
while trees wait vigilant  
and the bridge stays fixed  
on both sides of the stream  
whether i'm with you or not  
i seek to fulfil  
the distant mornings  
only in my dreams

the sea has no anxiety  
between the patience and  
the restlessness of the waves  
our intimacy gets recorded  
in very small measure  
in sequences of exclamation  
and punctuation marks  
and in riddles of casual narration

when the waves wipe away  
sands and seashells and  
our brief acquaintance  
we can only invoke the morning  
with a prayer on our lips  
while our hands frame  
the last sunset on the sea

## morning on the balcony



when you came the other evening  
roads were drowsing off  
to a tired sleep  
the platform was lonely  
after the last train had gone  
fragments of the day  
were strewn like waste paper  
all over my room  
the sunday was hanging  
helpless on the wall  
pensive time alone was sitting quiet  
on the vacant chair before me

on my lonesome bed were scattered  
my various thoughts :  
chance encounters on the road  
flowers blossoming out of season  
the first contacts  
the blurred snatches of an old song  
irrelevant questions  
and absurd replies  
the sudden arrival of spring  
my getting lost in fear and worry  
some being together  
and sometimes being alone  
disappearance of the sea  
shifting of the horizon



perilous voyage of the ship  
and my being left all alone  
with a handful of sea-shells

perchance you are in my room  
like god incarnate  
pervading sea land and sky  
you the final truth  
my past and future  
here and hereafter  
and my very present  
your blue chiffon  
the expanse of sea and sky  
your body the restlessness  
of the languorous beaches  
the intensity of waterfalls  
cascading in your hair  
and all the dark of the cursed cities  
sheltered in the twin pools  
of your sad blue eyes

when you laugh  
seasons would blossom like flowers  
days will flutter about like birds  
windows of night will open  
in far away lands  
your presence will be a rebirth for me  
and i'll attain immortality  
by your slightest touch

next morning the two of us  
will sit quiet on the balcony  
the sunshine on window panes  
will melt unto the floor

the train will steam away  
on the bridge across the city  
you'll be quiet  
your eyes on the headlines  
of the morning paper  
your manners precise and correct  
and when we talk  
the words will be measured in teaspoons

i'll have many doubts unresolved :  
you remember me or you don't  
you love me you love me not  
you'll come again  
this is our last meeting  
which is true which untrue  
the balcony the room the night  
the morning you or god

there will be many questions  
simmering in my eyes  
but your eyes will have no answers  
i'll live a little in the morning  
in memory of the past  
as i would have died a little  
the night before  
thinking about my future

# knowing you

to know you is a curse

when you are with me  
tempests breathe turbulence  
into castaway islands  
subconscious moments  
escape from the net of words  
dreams vanish  
into the morning sun  
shadows creep up and crowd  
the quiet corners of my room  
pent up laments  
moulder in the stone walls  
memories keep filling up  
the vacant spaces of time

with you beside me  
my eyes conjure up  
a pandemonium of colours  
protest in green's laughter  
assent in ochre's piety  
black's lament for the dead  
and then scarlet takes over  
the day founders on the rocks  
the sun is buried  
in the hill's coffin  
only the remnants of fire

burn the sky horizon leaves and bed

time stands back to listen  
and when everything is quiet  
the overcast sky  
knocks on my window panes  
and then the night

when i touch you

time closes its eyes  
wiping off a million stars  
from the face of the sky  
and scattering handfuls  
of long and sad nights  
like cold and dew  
then wild darkness  
pervades the room  
far going trains  
tear into distant hills  
a thousand suns explode  
leaving the sky resonant  
with the laughter of fighters

and then you come  
enveloping me like darkness  
like unending waves of pain  
in my every blood stream  
pain that is sensuous and warm  
and steeped in death wishes  
my only hesitation  
in destroying myself  
is whether it is to be  
in your eyes lips or your body

the release of my being  
which is knowing you  
becomes captive again  
in another being  
my love begins  
and ends simultaneous  
like death's count-down  
from the day of birth  
proving in eternity  
the feigned beginning  
of some scattered moments

sad yesterdays  
will remain forgotten  
and will become my future  
since i know you  
unborn memories though  
will be doing their best  
to keep away  
impending tomorrows

# darkness night time

when you are with me  
you are the darkness

a happening not subject to any code  
like darkness at noon  
the sun dead and unseen  
music floating soundless  
rainbows in black and white  
silent echoes in the room  
whiff of sea in the sky  
like a dream  
which is also reality and darkness

when you close your eyes  
you become the night

my home is a square island  
in the sea of darkness  
there is no one to see  
the pain of fever in my eyes  
no one to hear my screams  
the lighthouse in the distance  
only stands like a symbol of my sins  
who so ever i call for help  
becomes a stranger

on the same road on which i came  
amidst banners of welcome  
i return bare-hand and memoryless  
amid flags halfmast  
i put away my toy sword  
my tinsel crown my fancy robes  
my blood my flesh my skeleton  
my knowledge my intellect  
meditation contemplation  
my patience and endeavour

when you are not with me  
in the moments of our separation  
you become time

## in sequence

there is no end to this sequence  
the ocean waves  
playing on the beach and then  
dissolving in midocean  
touching the shore and receding  
into an unending blue eternity

there is no end to memories  
which go round and round  
in a pre-arranged sequence  
like the bird in the cage  
sometimes winging its way  
to the clouds  
to share its secrets with the sky  
and then coming back to its cage  
with memories of the unknown skies

there is no end to this sequence  
the bird's flight and return  
from the cage to the sky  
and from the sky to the cage  
sometimes the cage overflows  
with the bird's singing  
sometimes it is empty  
with memories as the only proof  
of the bird being there  
of the coming and going



from the sky of the cage  
to the cage of the sky

so there we are the two of us  
on the seashore looking at the skies  
sometimes close sometimes distant  
our remoteness very proximate sometimes  
as our proximity sometimes very remote  
sometimes shimmering in the morning sun  
and sometimes lost in total dark

# love is a season

perchance after many years  
i saw you last night  
you and layers of time  
forgetfulness and darkness  
i saw you exactly  
the way i had desired you  
the pangs of my secret moments  
i saw you last night suddenly  
and fear cut short my dream  
is there no difference between  
love and fear and dream and love

i had made you my own  
i recall ages past  
overcoming all fears of time  
and hesitations of the body  
with false promises  
and pretensions of sacrifice  
with magic words like  
life long and ever yours

some day again i don't know how  
i lost you amidst careless talk  
our love became untrue suddenly  
all our yesterdays left us alone  
our relationship centred  
only around the coffee table

the monsoon rain patters  
around my temporary dwelling  
the teacup clatters in my hand  
the torn calendar pages  
float in the air  
like my own future  
i reflect on sickness death  
heaven and hell  
i see my own dead body  
seeking shelter in womb or coffin

if love is thus a string  
of small encounters  
life and death a constant fear  
of disjointed moments  
if the borderline of knowing and  
forgetting is erased thus  
and the morning desire to live  
becomes death wish by evening

love and separation are  
mere surprises of the morning  
and misgivings of the evening  
when such havoc is wrought  
by time alone

## our adult love

memory is somewhat like a dream  
like clouds of mysterious shapes  
and rainbows in a benign sky  
memory is like  
an explosion of a thousand hues  
a riot of colours in the twitter  
of birds and the smile of flowers  
which only violet darkness can  
erase with a solemn silence

memory is like a dream  
a monsterless fairyland  
blessed by *kinnaries* and  
*gandharvas* in the seventh heaven  
memory is the sympathy of time  
the strange warmth of  
true and selfless love  
that's possible only at eighteen

when shadows lengthen  
we would be on the farewell road  
with an off-centre existence  
on the dubious boundaries of time  
we'll look at each other  
with borrowed love  
we'll count the routine moments  
with needless anxiety

listen to the roar of the ocean  
in the tiny seashell  
and look for the forest  
in the petals of a flower  
we'll wait all night hand in hand  
for the return of the dream  
imprisoning some of our memories  
in the confines of the present

with our adult eyes  
we'll look back at our youth  
the inexperienced excitement  
of the body's surprises  
from the safe lighthouse  
we'll see how we swim  
unafraid of the treacherous seas  
we'll look out unto the streets  
from our airconditioned hatches  
and see ourselves  
with not a care in the world  
walking down hand in hand  
sweltering in the summer heat  
and shivering in the winter cold

when the fairy tale ends  
like the morning dream  
the rainbow will blur in the clouds  
memories disperse in the daily grind  
dreams will scatter away  
colours of the sky will melt  
into shades of uncertain grey  
the sea will be unleashed from the shell  
and time be freed from the clockface

when the shadows are homeward bound  
living itself will lose all meaning

now is the time for forgetting  
for age has no compromises left  
the existence we thought  
was full of divine possibilities  
we'll discover alas  
is mere treacherous ways of love  
and sad mistakes of time

# our meeting one day

when did i meet you  
for the first time  
what exact day  
was it morning or evening  
was it a park or a cemetery  
was it on the train or on the platform  
was there the moon in the sky  
or clouds or meteor or rainbow  
was it in the *bazar* or in a procession  
on the footpath  
or in a forbidden street  
during early spring rains or winter  
or on a lonely river bank  
on which uncertain frontiers  
was our first meeting the other day

what was the painting on the wall  
which goddess in the temple  
how crowded the shops  
which half-read book in my hand  
how empty my glass  
was your frock blue or your *sari* green  
or orange or rose  
was there innocence on your face  
or was it some smile  
some lies some surprise  
how old were you

seventeen or was it twenty seven  
was there ebb or flow in your body  
was there invitation in your eyes  
or was there distrust curiosity  
sadness and fear

when i met you the first time  
i saw you and only you  
i thought the nights were all full moon  
and the seasons all spring  
i thought of carnivals  
and how the dreams would flower  
how morning and evening will mingle  
and red and rose become one  
how the only day of our meeting  
will become a season an aeon

our meeting one day  
acquaintance only the first time  
our conversation uncertain  
in the twilight of light and shade  
what an inauspicious moment  
was our meeting for the once only  
the parting had to come so soon  
after a single hesitant touch

when did i see you first  
how many days how many years back  
when exactly was our first meeting  
was it last night or this morning  
what was there in the sky  
stars clouds meteors comets  
full moon or new moon  
is it an unknown moment of tomorrow



was it morning or evening  
is it rains or winter  
will it be in the dead of the night  
and where  
*bazar* river bank procession  
temple forbidden street  
when will i see you again  
for the very first time  
how many days how many years later

our meetings are uncertain  
details of unseen dreams  
feelings without touch  
outcomes without reason  
search for relationships  
that do not exist  
waiting for days  
thar are yet to come  
only a habit of living  
that terminates in sure death

after all our meetings  
in half light and half shadows  
we'll meet again surely  
unexpected some day i know  
for the first time but then

with your eyes but once

tell me all that you had to say  
whether this night ends or not  
do tell me everything  
things which have  
neither beginning nor end  
things that are borrowed  
from books of verses

let the recitations end  
switch off the music  
that keeps time with your words  
silence the voice  
of moon cloud and sky  
tear off the pages of your diary  
let your love letters  
be lying in the purse  
let your lips be sealed  
whatever is to be said  
between you and me  
tell me with your eyes but once  
tell me with your eyes

i keep myself busy  
in the game of words  
i dissect love letters to see  
who wrote them and why  
i analyse dialogues to see

why one said that in that manner  
i look up the dictionary  
for the definition of love  
and i pore over the treatise of  
loving in four easy lessons

all that goes waste  
plays novels love poems  
all the letters written to you  
and all the post offices opened  
my whispering your name  
over and over like a *mantra*  
my room stays locked  
and my poems lie in wait for you  
love comes and goes away unseen  
on the road through parks  
and in coffee houses

when will the sea of words be calm  
the movies become silent  
the stage coach move noiseless  
on the cobbled streets  
the trains steam away soundless  
leaving only a tremor  
the jets fly smooth and quiet  
parting the sky in two  
and when the rains come  
will there only be lightning  
and no thunder

all that was to be said  
sea of words waves of sound  
your words your letters your diary  
let everything be forgotten tonight

just look from one eye to the other  
from island to island  
tell me by a single glance  
let a second spring time come

let silence span across  
the twin shores of time  
all that was to be said  
of courtship love living  
death resurrection and all that  
tell me with your eyes but once  
tell me with your eyes

## halfway through my dream

i was halfway through my dream  
when the royal hunt came to an end  
the forest broke loose  
from the grip of fright  
and the rule of terror ended  
hands of friendship bloomed  
in the thorny boughs  
of unfriendly trees  
the deer went back to sleep  
in the last hours of the night  
bored courtiers faked lament  
the widower king tossed about  
on the withered flowers on the bed

windows opened their eyes  
though the dream and the night  
were yet unfinished  
the chatter of birds  
rent the intimacy of darkness  
leaves got restless in the breeze  
the horizon melted  
the sky flamed in *gulmohur* fires  
the morning came with  
irritated sunshine storm and grey  
with a flutter in the heart  
and weariness in the eyes

now is the time to leave  
for the road is long and lonely  
the footprints are indistinct  
there is no one ahead  
barring stragglers and sinners  
the only familiar faces  
are of pilgrims travellers and priests  
shadows look like *ashrams*  
and all that hints at a shelter  
is only the wood

this road has no end  
for the forest encircles the road  
it's difficult to see  
where the road ends  
and the forest begins  
the legs tire out  
but night's mystery  
remains unsolved  
all the questions keep tense  
awaiting an answer

let the morning stay sad  
let the road have no end  
let the questions brood  
let the cremation fires burn  
let the sky rain blood  
let the wind get restless  
let handfuls of silence  
stifle all wishes  
but pray don't leave me alone  
in this confusion of  
road and forest

when the mysterious coffin  
of the night before  
will shine in the soft morning sun  
please stay beside me  
with your hesitant hand on mine  
i know you'll be quiet  
but your eyes will be alert  
with numerous questions in them

from the sunkissed coffin  
i'll pull away the shroud of flowers  
to redeem my incomplete dream  
you'll raise your eyes to mine  
seeking in them the answer

but alas in vain  
for who can solve  
the mystery that is death  
in a sometime tenuous love

## second morning

it is better to forget  
this city and its familiar streets  
this house this bed  
this body and its strange geometry  
the paintings static  
on their own easels  
the fixed smiles  
of temple goddesses  
measured reactions  
written down conversation  
irrevocable relationships  
and the inevitable cycle of seasons

it's all known for certain  
the distance between earth and moon  
where the mountains end  
and the valley begins  
where the forest is  
and where *mansarovar*  
how far the house from the road  
how far the bed from the chair  
how close the body  
how far and how near  
the waist and the forehead

i know for certain  
what exactly you'll whisper



unto my ears tonight  
how much you'll touch me  
how much of you  
you will surrender to me  
how light my body will become  
how much i'll float  
how far i'll fly  
and where my wings will tire  
where the storm subside  
and the moon hide  
when all will be quiet  
the sea the sky the clouds  
and the chattering birds

i know too when this night shall end  
and the stars scatter away  
how many handfuls of sunlight will fall  
and where exactly on my bed  
how many open safetypins on my pillow  
how weary my body  
how much sleep in my eyes  
how heavy my head  
and at what moment i'll think  
it's better to forget  
this house this bed this body  
this mind this consciousness

i know exactly too  
when my thinking will cease  
i'll hear my name called out  
from beyond the bathroom door  
and i'll answer it  
i will yes i will



Jagannath Prasad Das, the noted Oriya poet and playwright is already a well known name in the national literary scene. His poetry has been widely translated, and his plays have been staged in different parts of the country in several languages. His publications include : *Pratham Purush* (1971), *Anyu Sabu Mrityu* (1975), *Nirjanata* (1978), all collections of poems; and plays: *Suryaast* (1973), and *Sabse Neeche Ka Aadmi* (1976).

The first collection of his poems in English translation—*First Person*—was widely acclaimed by both readers and critics.

Born in 1936 in Orissa, he now lives and works in New Delhi.

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